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THE ART AMATEUR

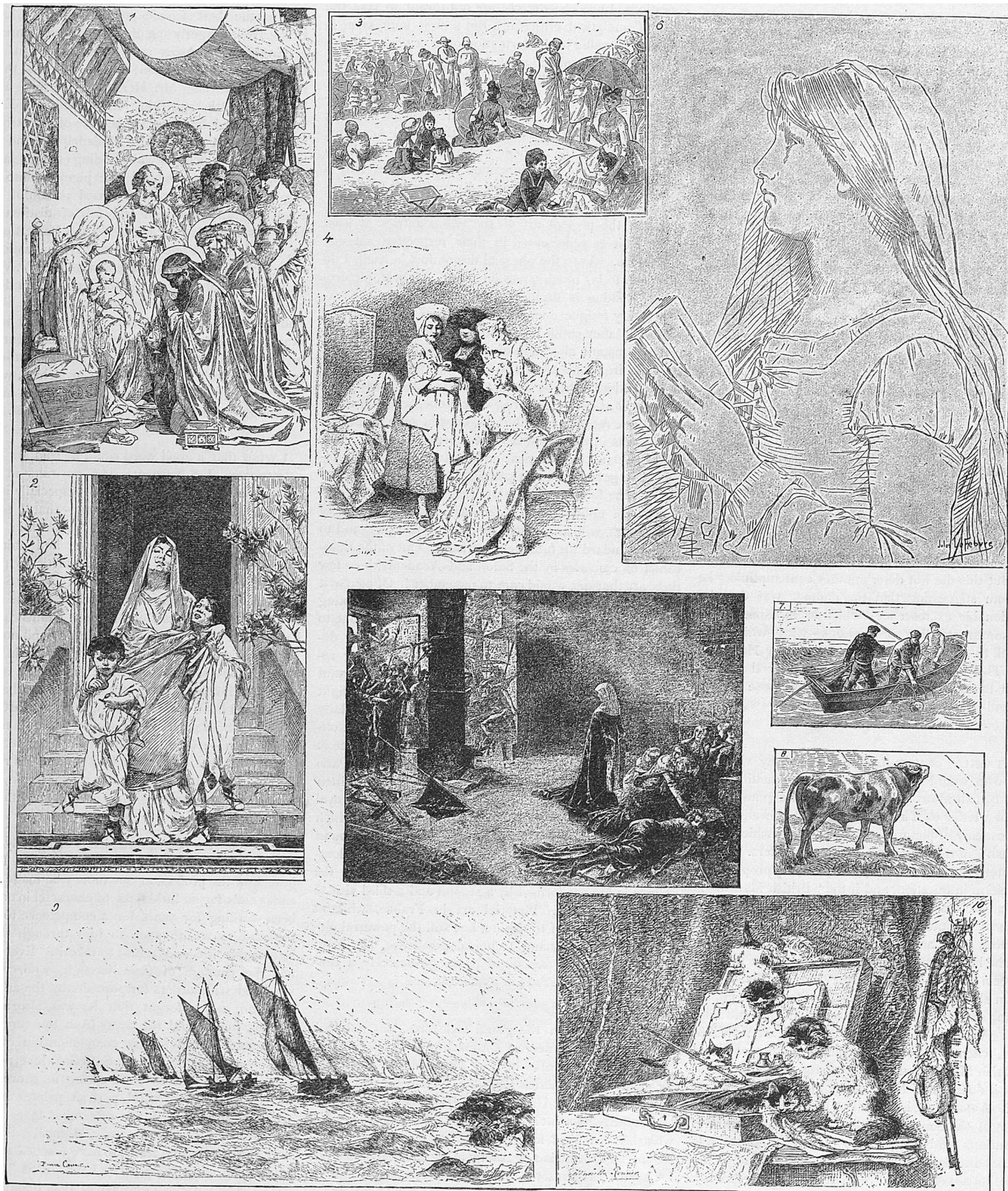
DEVOTED TO THE CULTIVATION OF
ART IN THE HOUSEHOLD

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PICTURES IN THE PARIS SALON OF 1885.

1. "THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI." BY W. A. BOUGUEREAU. 2. "THE MOTHER OF THE GRACCHI." BY G. BOULANGER. 3. "THE BATHING HOUR AT TRÉPOT." BY A. AUBLET. 4. "THE FIRST TOOTH." BY C. BAUGNIERT. 5. "THE JACQUERIE." BY G. ROCHEGROSSE. 6. "LAURE." BY J. LE FEBVRE. 7. "LOBSTER FISHING." BY G. BOURGAIN. 8. "AN ALPINE BULL." BY R. BURNAND. 9. "THE RETURN OF THE SHRIMPERS." BY M. F. A. COURANT. 10. "A FINE ART SCHOOL." BY HENRIETTA RONNER.

My Note Book.

*Leonato.—Are these things spoken, or do I but dream?
Don John.—Sir, they are spoken, and these things are true.
—Much Ado About Nothing.*

THE discovery of numerous scratches on pictures at the Royal Academy exhibition has been the occasion of a flood of indignant letters to the London newspapers. And what particularly arouses the public wrath is that, even after the outrage has been exposed, the offence has been repeated. The general belief is that the damage was done by, or at the instigation of, artists whose pictures were rejected. Such a suspicion, of course, is monstrous, but no one seems to have taken the trouble to intimate as much. Testimony has been offered, however, to prove that the scratching must have been done between certain hours when the general public and non-exhibiting artists were not admitted. Later, a letter has appeared in *The Daily News*—if I remember right—pointing out how easy it would be for an attendant to inflict the damage, quite innocently, by dusting the pictures with a half-worn feather-brush. This seems to solve the whole mystery. At one time there was a great outcry in the newspapers at the vandalism of certain ruffians who had stripped the bark off the trees in St. James Park. Detectives were set to watch for the offenders; but despite their vigilance the trouble continued. Finally some one discovered that this particular kind of tree sheds its own bark. While it can hardly be urged that the paintings at the Royal Academy scratch *themselves*, it is easy to see how the scratching may continue even after attention has been called to the fact, and yet the public may be guiltless in the matter.

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AMONG the various explanations offered by newspaper correspondents of the damage done the pictures, one was that the ladies poked their heads forward and scratched the canvases with the protruding pins which are worn in hats and bonnets nowadays. This called forth a crushing rejoinder from a spirited defender of her sex, who scoffed at the ignorance of "the he thing," as she called the offender, who did not know that the points of the pins were turned in the opposite direction to that of sight. But this did not deter another contemptible "he thing" from suggesting that the damage was done by the fashionable excrescence—which in London, by the way, assumes startling proportions—with which the ladies seek to rival the graceful form of their Hottentot sisters. The wretch intimated that literally the ladies turn their backs on the pictures for the purpose of gossiping, and that is how the damage is done.

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I CERTAINLY confess to more sympathy with the woman who would resent this base insinuation than for the "British Matron" who has been indignantly protesting, in a letter to *The Times*, against the admission to the Academy of pictures of nude figures, which made her "blush" in the company of her daughters. There is absolutely nothing even approaching impropriety in the exhibition in question, and if the "British Matron" is not a prurient prude, she is, to say the least, a person of very imperfect education. Her letter has been discussed a good deal, and I am surprised to find how many followers she has among sensible women, whose mothers would seem to have taught them everything that a gentlewoman should know except that perhaps most important thing of all, to distinguish between true and false delicacy. What a sham is the so-called art revival in England, when it appears that this ignorant protest of the "British Matron" really represents—as I am satisfied that it does—the feelings of the mass of middle-class society! Among the higher class of society, where the daughter of the house has, from childhood, lived with fine paintings and sculpture, and would be severely reprimanded for her indelicacy should she find anything indecent in a work of art in itself wholly pure, such a letter, of course, provokes an amused and pitying smile. Servant girls, in dusting the pictures and statuary, must frequently be shocked in the same way; but they do not write to *The Times*, proclaiming their ignorance. I wonder, by the way, what pleasure the "British Matron" and her daughters can derive from their visits to the

great art galleries of Europe, which it is their boast to have seen, when the mere suggestion of the undraped human figure is an abomination in their eyes!

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IT will hardly be claimed, I think, by the most ardent admirer of the British nation, that the pictorial art of the country is just now in a very hopeful condition; yet the prevailing impression of innocuous inanity one gets from a visit to the Royal Academy is a positive relief after the disgust one experiences in confronting the pictorial horrors and indecencies which give the first impression in a visit to the Paris Salon. You leave the Palais de l'Industrie with a bad taste in the mouth; Burlington House, simply tired, and irritated at having wasted your energies in looking at such a mass of rubbish as occupies the greater part of the wall space. These general observations, I need hardly say, are not meant to take the place of analytical criticism. But a first impression is not without value in the formation of a critical estimate of the merit of a collection of paintings; certainly a first visit should leave a feeling quite different from that of disgust or contempt—as, indeed, it does if made to such collections as those of the Louvre and the National Gallery; so that when a visit to the Salon or the Royal Academy, instead of giving the aesthetic pleasure we are taught to associate with the true functions of art, leaves only a feeling of mental and physical discomfort, it is not unreasonable to assume that there is something radically wrong in the present art of the two countries, at least so far as it is represented in their respective national exhibitions. As to the physical discomfort in itself, I do not mean to lay much stress on that. At best, picture-gallery visiting is tiring. Ruskin thinks that the extraordinary fatigue one experiences from it—"Academy headache" they call it in London—is due, in part at least, to the constant alteration of the focus of the eye as it wanders from one picture to another. He is probably right; and it might be added that it is particularly painful to look at skied pictures, which one, accustomed to New York Academy exhibitions, does in spite of himself if he wants to find what is most worthy of notice. But while overtasking physical endurance will produce fatigue in a gallery of great paintings as well as of inferior ones, in the former case we at least carry away the impression of noble works, which, even after the lapse of many years, will linger still to give us pleasure, and to form a standard for future comparisons. Out of the thousands of canvases in the Salon and Academy, how few there are that one would care to remember! Of course it would not only be unfair but impudent, after devoting a few brief hours to each of these exhibitions, for one to attempt to dispose of their claims by such sweeping denunciation as may seem implied in the foregoing remarks. In two such large and, in a sense, important collections, detailed examination must bring to light many pictures worthy of praise. This is particularly true of the Salon exhibition, whose merits are at first obscured by the aggressiveness in size and prominence in position of the more objectionable paintings. The Paris correspondent of *The Art Amateur* has already written in detail on the subject. But in the case of the Royal Academy, although there are not a few works which save the exhibition from absolute contempt, I am bound to say that the first impression of the general worthlessness of the collection is not materially modified by the calmer judgment formed by a second and a third visit to Burlington House. Pictorial art in France, while at present in a state of transition, has still the powerful elements of originality and technical excellence. In England the English school of painting—scarcely a century old—seems already in its decadence.

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FOR painting in the grand style one does not look to England. The nearest approach to it has been found in some of the works of the President of the Royal Academy, Sir Frederick Leighton. His canvases are all but unknown in the United States; but when it is said that he has the refinement and artificial grace of Cabanel, somewhat less technical facility and rather more force, it may be judged that he is not exactly a Michael Angelo; but he is quite as handsome and in point of accomplishments almost as versatile as the great Tuscan. This year he sends only a decorative frieze, called "Music," very agreeable in color, and a bloodless portrait, as smooth and pretty as a young lady's porcelain painting. George F. Watts, whom we know by the loan collection of his works at the Metropolitan Museum as a poetical painter of high

ambition, sends to the Grosvenor Gallery his "Love and Life"—the companion to his "Love and Death," familiar to New Yorkers. To the Academy he contributes a full-length portrait of "Miss Laura Gurney," which is more than doubtful in drawing, carelessly modelled, and by no means pleasing in color. Hubert Herkomer has several portraits of public men, including Sir Watkin Wynn, of railroad fame, and the Earl of Ducie—or rather the head of his lordship, for what should be the body is nothing but a rusty suit of empty clothes. But he has made a most serious effort in the portrait of Miss Katharine Grant, one of those studies in white in which Comerre succeeded wonderfully and his imitators have generally failed. As Mr. Herkomer has not the gift of color, it is not surprising that he, too, has been overcome by the technical difficulties of the problem; but the figure of the lady is boldly and carefully painted, and, altogether, this is the best female portrait of his I have seen. Frank Holl, formerly one of the strongest genre painters in England, produces now little else than portraits. In the present exhibition he has no less than eight, which, while—like Mr. Herkomer's—broad and forcible, have little spirit in impersonation. Exceptions must be noted, however, in the case of his strong heads of Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, of Philadelphia, and the Earl of Dufferin, which, notwithstanding the audacity with which the artist has rubbed blue pigment into his lordship's hair, to balance the broad ribbon of the same color, is grandly painted and full of distinction. Mr. Holl has a life-size picture of Wilson Barrett as "Hamlet," but it is the Prince of the tawdry, conventional stage type, with all its commonplace sentiment. W. W. Ouless, another popular portrait painter, sends half a dozen canvases; but he seems singularly careless of his reputation, his faces each year getting more painty and unnatural. Val Prinsep, who has some excellent genre pictures in the exhibition, fails miserably in his terra-cotta and crimson portrait of Mrs. David Carmichael, which is to be placed in "the new Hospital for Women in Madras"—another instance of British tyranny in India.

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I WISH that a good word could be said for our gifted countryman, J. S. Sargent. His portraits in the Paris Salon showed such a falling off—especially in the bad drawing of the hands of his sitters—that I sought out with more than common interest his work in the Royal Academy. It is no less mannered and uninteresting. His "Lady Playfair" is as unsympathetically posed and as streakily painted as his "Mme. V." at the Salon. Mr. Sargent, it is understood, has profited by the decadence of his master, Carolus Duran, whose whimsical egotisms have driven to the studio of his clever pupil not a few of M. Duran's former friends and admirers in the beau monde. But Mr. Sargent must now look to his own laurels. His charming portrait of Miss Burckhardt, which established his reputation, in America at least—his previously painted portrait of Carolus Duran is not so well known there—will not much longer serve him in stead. It is about three years since he produced his remarkable picture of dancing women in a Spanish inn, and since he has exhibited nothing worthy of his reputation.

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SUCCESS in portraiture has, artistically speaking, ruined the career of many a gifted painter. In no other branch of the profession can money be made so rapidly, and it calls for no little force of character in one who has been working for years for a competence to see at last the road to wealth open to him through the gate of fashionable life and refuse to take it. Every artist has not the courage of Gainsborough, who, when overwhelmed with orders for portraits by the aristocracy of England, never forgot that he was also a landscape painter, and would run away from the caresses of the fashionable world to the companionship of the trees and meadows of his dear Suffolk. Just now I mentioned Frank Holl as once strong in genre. Since he has become a successful portrait painter he has produced nothing that I can remember in earnest of the early promise of his "Leaving Home." So with Hubert Herkomer, who seems to have reached the height of his artistic career with "The Last Muster" and "Missing." And what can one say of that once enthusiastic young pre-Raphaelite, John Everett Millais, when we see him rest his reputation at the Academy this year on such a canvas as "The Ruling Passion"—a family group surrounding an invalid ornithologist, with stuffed birds of brilliant plumage about him, and all the figures

and accessories of the picture keyed up to the highest pitch to respond to the shrieking color which gives the motive for this extraordinary performance? The faces evidently are portraits, although among the children one recognizes the time-honored young lady who has been painted by Mr. Millais over and over again and, with slightly varying costume, called "Caller Herrin," "Cinderella," and I know not what besides. But she is getting a big girl now, and the artist will soon be obliged to find another model for his pictures of youthful maidens. Yet let me be fair. Mr. Millais's portraits of children are as admirable as ever. In his best days he did nothing more delightful than "The Lady Peggy Primrose" in the present exhibition. But are we never to have another genre picture from his brush like his "Huguenot Lovers," "The Black Brunswicker," "The Release," "The Eve of St. Agnes" and "The Crown of Love?" That Mr. Millais should have got over his pre-Raphaelite fever at an early age is not to be regretted; but that his artistic enthusiasm, which subsequently found expression in such pictures as I have named, should have died away and given place to the perfunctory portrait painting, which now forms the style of his work, is sincerely to be deplored. Canvases of "The Lady Peggy Primrose" type will always be popular in England, where the love of home and the little ones is great. G. A. Storey follows in the same vein with "As Good as Gold," a charming little girl wearing a mob cap and posed like Reynolds's "Penelope Boothby," of which one is otherwise forcibly reminded by this picture. Joseph Clarke shows, with the title "Mother's Darling," a young mother leaning fondly over the bed of her sick boy. In this class of subjects the British painter particularly excels; and however some of our art critics may sneer at it, it certainly should be more in sympathy with American ideas than the ribald or frivolous class of subject which gives the tone to modern French genre. If there be an English school of painting apart from landscape, it is to be recognized rather by the attention given to the study of human expression in the portrayal of incidents in domestic or national life than by technical excellence, in which the artists of Great Britain have never held high rank. Wilkie's "Blind Fiddler," "The Rent Day" and "The Cut Finger," William Collins's "Happy as a King," Erskine Nicol's "Both Puzzled," Henry O'Neil's "Eastward Ho!" Frith's "Railway Station" and "The Derby Day"—these, while often showing very inferior painting, are as thoroughly national as the illustrations in Punch by Charles Keane or that masterly draughtsman, Du Maurier, and they are as opposite in sentiment from anything French as is Punch from the Journal Pour Rire or the infamous *Vie Parisienne*.

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BUT when the ambition of the British artist turns him from this legitimate field for his labors to attempt a classical or a sacred theme, he is almost sure to fail. This fact is painfully illustrated in regard to the latter by Frederick Goodall at the Royal Academy. In an attempt to represent the descent of the Spirit of God, in the form of a dove, upon the Holy Child, he has produced a picture which—while conceived, doubtless, in all reverence—must, by reason of its total lack of sentiment, shock the religious sense of every Christian visitor. And it is not only in scriptural themes—of which, happily, there are few in the exhibition—that the British painter fails, but in almost every subject calling for poetic treatment. Take the nude pictures, intended to be classical, such as E. J. Poynter's "Diadumenē," Miss Rae's "Ariadne Deserted by Theseus"—a case of justifiable abandonment, if ever there was one, or Philip Calderon's overfed "Andromeda." They are made up of mere forms, more or less beautiful, and utterly without sentiment or expression. Turn to the draped classicism, I will not say of that most wretched of daubers, J. R. Herbert, no less than seven of whose canvases are on "the line," but of that other, and certainly more durable Academician, Edwin Long, who exhibits an even half dozen; and when you learn that the productions of the latter are in great demand and sell for thousands of pounds apiece, wonder no longer at the woeful state of pictorial art in England. Then we have Frith's attempt at an historical picture—"John Knox at Holyrood"—the fiery divine most unprovokedly interrupting a crowd of expressionless courtiers listlessly playing "Hunt the Slipper;" Philip Morris's sprawling effort in a similar field, "The First Prince of Wales," and Elizabeth

Butler's latest failure at a British battle scene. By the way, it is not generally known that the latter lost by only one vote her chance of becoming an associate of the Royal Academy, Hubert Herkomer winning the honor in her stead. She will never have another chance.

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IT is wonderful, too, to see the size of the canvas which is found necessary for the conveyance of the grand conceptions of some of the painters—W. F. Yeames's "Prisoners of War," for instance, showing two young English middies of the time of Bonaparte, in the custody of French grenadiers, and curiously regarded by a crowd of picturesquely attired fisherwomen, who, as a witty young lady of my acquaintance remarked, looked like chorus women in Italian opera, who did not know what to do with their hands. The same criticism would apply to J. E. Hodgson's "Don Quixote Freeing the Galley Slaves," with the difference that in the latter case the scenery as well would seem to have been copied from the opera-house, and that the painting is far inferior to that of Mr. Yeames, whose picture in parts has decided merit, especially in the facial expressions of the prisoners, one of whom is recklessly defiant, and the other would be so if the poor lad were not evidently suffering from a wound incurred probably in resisting capture. In lighting his picture, the British painter seems no less dependent upon the teachings of the stage than in the grouping of his supernumeraries. From no other source could Mr. Dicksee have got the inspiration for the tricky canvas he calls "Chivalry," or Mr. Riviere for his "Sheep Stealer," with the moonlight turned on in a way only known to the spectacular drama.

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RUSKIN says somewhere that though not infallibly a test of character in individuals color power is a great sign of mental health in nations; when they are in a state of intellectual decline, their coloring always gets dull. This is sad if true, for that English painters are, as a rule, deficient in the sense of color is well known. A few seem sensible of the fact, and boldly try to shine among their brethren by force of contrast. Chief of these is Luke Fildes, once one of the foremost of the British genre school. But apparently he has fallen by the way, together with Millais, Herkomer, Holl, and Morris, who, at one time, bade fair to maintain the succession of such men as Wilkie, Nicoll and O'Neil. He now paints glowing Venetian scenes of flowers and flower girls, which, while intended to be gay in color, are too often merely gaudy. At best, such pictures are frivolous compared with the earnest genre work on which he founded his reputation. A curious example of the indifference of the English artist to chromatic principles in painting is furnished by the otherwise excellent picture by John Pettie, called "Challenge," representing a young blood who has slipped on his blue robe de chambre and white satin breeches to receive the bearer of a cartel, the occasion of which evidently puzzles him. Only the back of the envoy is seen as he swaggers out of the bedroom, but the expression is as admirably conveyed as the bewilderment of the challenged. Now, the canvas might be cut perpendicularly in two parts, and it would be found that the whole of the right side, including the bed-hangings and the costume of the young gentleman, is cold in color, while the rest of the picture is about as hot as the glowing reds could make it. Even in the "Salon of Mme. Recamier," by W. Q. Orchardson, who is probably the best painter of genre in England, although his style is not at all English—indeed, if it were not known that he has studied only at the schools of the Scottish Academy and of the Royal Academy of London, it would not be easy to believe that his peculiar elegance and facile technique had not been acquired under the influence of French masters—even in his pictures, and noticeably in the one named, one finds curious blemishes in color. In the interesting canvas under consideration spots of hot color are distributed over the picture in a way that cannot fail to offend the critical eye.

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IN landscape and marine there are more good pictures in the exhibition than the limited space I have left myself will allow me to do anything like justice. In the former branch of painting English artists deservedly hold high rank. An admirable sea piece is "Yo, Heave oh!" by J. C. Hook, showing a group of fishermen and women hauling a boat up the beach on a breezy day. The wind is really blowing, the men and women really working,

and the very atmosphere seems to have the flavor of the ocean. I think this, in some respects, a better picture than "The Stream," by the same artist, which has been bought by the Academy under the terms of the Chantrey bequest. Mr. Hook's "Close of Day" is a fine golden sunset effect, fiery and Turneresque. Vicat Cole's "Iffley Mill" and "Sinodum Hill" show that he has forfeited none of his claim as an admirable interpreter of the sweet sentiment of English landscape. John Brett, who is greatly admired in England, contributes a liberal number of his wonderfully sunny Cornish coast scenes, in which every pebble and every lichen is rendered with untiring industry and fidelity. I have read somewhere of a pre-Raphaelite landscape—merely a representation of a bit of waste land, if I remember aright—which filled a botanist with wild delight because, on looking at the picture, he recognized the locality immediately as that where a peculiar species of dandelion is to be found, which the artist had faithfully recorded. A naturalist might experience the same joy in regarding one of Mr. Brett's coast scenes. I am sure that every shell and every bit of sea-weed the latter introduces in his pictures could at once be recognized and labelled. This is all very well, judging the painter's work from his own point of view as to the proper functions of the artist in the premises; but for my own part, I confess that I find it hard to believe that such photographic transcripts from nature have any serious claim to be considered as high art. Much more to my liking is Henry Moore's admirably rendered stretch of sea, without pictorial incident of any kind save the distant steamer, which gives the title, "The Newhaven Packet."

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WERE it not for its great size and the fact that it was heralded in the American journals last year that such a picture was being painted for the Royal Academy, I would not refer to Colin Hunter's "Niagara." A more dreadful failure to paint the noble rapids above the Falls assuredly was never seen. How such a wretched performance—chunks of adamantine matter absolutely without movement—could be admitted even to the Royal Academy passes comprehension.

* * *

ALFRED HUNT'S "Bright October," showing a peaceful, secluded glen, with pools of water, is thoroughly English in sentiment, poetically conceived, and cleverly executed. Very different in its French manner, and the more interesting by contrast on that account, is the charmingly painted "Autumn Afternoon," by our expatriated Bostonian, Mark Fisher; and in an adjacent room we come upon his "Cattle: Bay of Kenmare," which, full of knowledge and love of nature, no less has a distinction of its own. Ernest Parton sends two excellent landscapes—"The Twilight Hour" and "Streatley-on-Thames," one of a series of country homes in England. E. A. Abbey has "A Milkmaid," which I somehow failed to see. George W. Boughton sends "Milton Visited by Andrew Marvel"—containing many figures—a well-composed exterior view of an Elizabethan dwelling. There are some exquisite passages of color, but it cannot be said that, as a whole, the picture is interesting. One gets tired of the heavy-faced, thick-lipped men and women Mr. Boughton invariably gives us, whether the subject be Hollander, Puritan, or English of the last century. Among several contributions of Anna Lea Merritt, nothing pleases me so much as the graceful seated figure, in profile, of "Eve." The face is almost concealed, as it terminates the beautiful line made by the curve of the back. Mrs. Merritt's other canvases are portraits of Sir Lambton Loraine, Lady Loraine and child, and Mr. Russell Sturgis. These all show a decided improvement in technique.

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HERE I am at the end of my notice of the Academy, and actually have forgotten to mention Alma Tadema, around whose picture in the Exhibition there is always an admiring crowd. "Reading from Homer" it is called, and it reminds one of his "Sappho." I find it interesting only from the fact that the textures are as wonderfully rendered as usual. But is it not time that this artist gave us something beside marble? Undoubtedly he paints it better than any other master, living or dead; but surely that is not enough to maintain the rank accorded him by his friends as one of the first artists of the day!

MONTEZUMA.

LONDON, June 26, 1885.